

45 years ago right about this time on this day which also was a Friday and also obviously Halloween, I found myself seated in the back seat of a rather large Oldsmobile departing the land of the Basement Tapes for the city of Boston. It was my first trip to Boston. I was on my way to my second and third (since there were two shows) concerts by The Band. Driving the Oldsmobile was a sax player and riding shotgun a flute player. I had the window seat on the driver's side and sitting at the other window seat was my friend Dave, a singer in a local band and sitting between was a guy who'd had a few hits with some Irish band about 4 years before and a top ten hit on his own 2 years before. He was the opening act. It was my first time seeing him play on a stage. I'd only met him a couple of days before, playing drums with my brother's band in the living room of the house the band lived in.

I'm still not sure how I got to go on this particular trip, but I wasn't about to say no. The night before I was given a quickie crash course on how to deal with former teenage rock and roll stars from Belfast who happened to be crazed geniuses. "Say this, don't say that. Even better, don't say anything at all and pretend you're invisible."

Somewhere in the first hour of the ride, I asked him, "What do you think of Nashville Skyline?"

"Fuck Johnny Cash!" Silence. "I'm into John Lee Hooker and Lead Belly and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee."

After that he sort of lightened up. Every once in a while he'd sort of nudge me as if the whole thing was a private joke.

We arrived in Boston and parked on the street about a block from the Boston Symphony. Before we'd even parked he was saying, "Let's find the package store." We started walking down the street and it being Halloween, some guy came ambling down the street in a huge bear costume. The singer jumped about six feet sideways. We found the package store and went backstage at the Boston Symphony. The guys from The Band were already there. We were shown a dressing room, and Dave and I were given all access passes, but we stayed out of the way of The Band. We went into the theater to watch the show which was the with the band from Moondance, but with no guitar player, and most of the songs were from that album which wasn't even finished yet. He did a speedy run through of his recent hit trying to get it over with as fast as possible.

In the lobby during intermission I ran into a good friend from my hometown. "Who the hell was that guy?," he asked. "He was terrible."

"Uh, I'm here with that guy."

"He was awful."

"Go listen to Astral Weeks." Two years after that, my friend moved to Philly and thought Astral Weeks was one of the greatest things he ever heard.

We went back into the theater to watch The Band. Between shows Dave and I went backstage and the dressing room was off limits. We might've snuck a sandwich or something off The Band's spread or maybe we didn't eat at all.

The second show was even crazier and ended with the singer lying on the stage flat on his back singing "Cyprus Avenue."

We went backstage after the set to see if we were leaving right away. "The Band's having a party at the Boston Sheraton," the singer said. So we went to watch The Band's set and then went to the Boston Sheraton. Maria Muldaur and some people from the Boston folk scene were there. Only Rick Danko showed up, and the person he was most interested in talking to was the guy I came with. It was fly on the wall time. "You ever play chess or checkers, Van? We sure could party good together Van." The next day The Band were going to play the Ed Sullivan Show. "I'm gonna shake Ed Sullivan's hand, man."

At some ridiculous hour like four in the morning, we got back in the Olds for the 200 mile drive back to Woodstock. At the last toll at Saugerties, everyone in the car had to dig in their pockets for change. I should have known right then and there to stay away from the music business.

The next night, back in New York City, I watched The Band on the Ed Sullivan Show. Rick Danko made sure he shook Ed Sullivan's hand.